

# BRITISH CAR REGISTRATIONS

DARRYL FRANCIS

Mitcham, Surrey, England

In his August 1988 **Word Ways** article, "Unabbreviation", Stuart Baird offered a license-plate game. This game could be played with various different rules, leading to different "best" solutions.

I thought that **Word Ways** readers might be interested in the various games that I play with British registration numbers, the equivalent of US license plates. All new registrations have the format [1 letter][number][3 letters], where the number is between 21 and 999 inclusive. Certain letters -- I, Q, and Z -- are not used, and no numbers start with a zero. Some examples: A21 FGH, D412 XPU, B789 BNM, E999 OOO, C84 WWW, F100 RST.

Prior to this, the format used for about 20 years was [3 letters][number][1 letter], with the number between 1 and 999. As before, I, Q, and Z were not used, nor did numbers begin with zero. So, the great majority of registrations issued in the last 25 to 30 years have had 5, 6, or 7 alphanumeric characters, with well over 90 per cent having 7.

As an ardent Scrabble player, I was intrigued with the proliferation of 7-character registrations; this was too good an opportunity not to do something with. I decided to convert each numeric into that letter which it (more or less) represented: 1 to I, 2 to Z, 3 to E, 4 to A, 5 to S, 6 to G, 7 to T, 8 to B, 9 to G (again), and 0 to O. With these, all 7-character registrations can immediately be viewed as a collection of 7 letters. Is there a 7-letter word which can be made by rearranging these letters? If not, what is the longest word that can be made by rearranging a subset of the letters? If I were playing a game of Scrabble without regard to the state of the board or the current score, what word would I try to play? Or what tiles would I exchange? Just addressing these questions to one particular registration provides plenty of mental exercise.

If a registration only has 5 or 6 characters, I take the opportunity to make up the required 7 with one or two blanks. Thus, XPC 69M becomes XPCGGM and blank.

Games unrelated to Scrabble can also be played with the registrations. If there isn't a 7-letter word, can I find a word by adding one or more letters of my choice and rearranging these? What is the shortest such word I can find?

If one wishes to avoid the mental effort of translating numbers into letters, one can use only the letters appearing on the registration. What is the shortest word containing the 4 letters? What

is the shortest word containing the 4 letters if they must appear in order within the word?

A few examples may be in order here. E514 NMR is translated to ESIANMR, from which the 7-letter words MARINES, REMAINS, SEMINAR, and SIRNAME can be made. I am continually surprised at how many registrations do seem to generate perfectly ordinary 7-letter names. A771 HNS is translated to ATTIHNS, which cannot be turned into a 7-letter word, but by adding the letters E, U, and S one can generate ENTHUSIAST. Is there a 9-letter or shorter word containing ATTIHNS? EDU 155X is translated to EDUISSX. Again, no 7-letter words appear possible, but the 6-letter ISSUED is easily located. Finally, let's concentrate on the real letters only of EDU 999V. The 3 letters EDU can be rearranged to give DUE, and can be found in order in EDUCE. The four letters EDUV cannot be rearranged to give a 4-letter word, but can be found in the 5-letter DUVET. The shortest word in which EDUV appears in order is probably EDUCATIVE.

And so on and so on...

### **GET THEE TO A PUNNERY**

*This is the title of a new (1988) book by Richard Lederer, published in paperback (\$7.95) and cloth (\$11.95) by Wyrick and company, Charleston SC. It is a light-hearted journey through many subspecies of puns: knock-knock jokes, anguish languish ("ladle rat rotten hut"), Tom Swifties, ambiguous headlines ("Squad Helps Dog Bite Victim"), daffynitions, and spoonerisms. There are hundreds of examples, plus quizzes to test the reader's ability to represent the various types of puns.*

*There's even a bit of theory: Lederer classifies most puns as homographic (two different meanings for the same word); homophonic (two different words having the same sound); and double sound (two different words having approximately the same sound). Examples of these are: the butcher backed into a meat-grinder and got a little behind in his work; the mother named her ranch Focus because it was where her sons raise meat; the Brontë sisters engaged in scribbling rivalry.*